

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**SHIFTING GEARS PROJECT
NORTH ADAMS**

**INFORMANT: THORMAN HULSE
INTERVIEWER: ROBERT GABRIELSKY
DATE: APRIL 17, 1989
PLACE: WILLIAMSTOWN, MASSACHUSETTS**

**R = ROBERT
T = THORMAN**

SG-NA-T021

Tape begins with interviewer in mid-sentence:

R: . . .elsky. I'm (--) The date is April 17th, 9, 1989. We're interviewing Thorman Hulse [T: umhm] in his home in Williamstown, Massachusetts [Noise caused by movement of microphones] for the Shifting Gears Oral History Project. Okay, let me find out if I'm recording. [Tape shuts off and on again]

Um, where were your grandparents from?

T: Uh, which side?

R: Both sides.

T: Now one set (--) They're both originally from Schenectady County in New York, but they both immigrated there from other places. They, the family came up from Orange County in one hand and came out of uh, the western Mohawk Valley in the other hand.

R: Are they uh, what is their ethnic background?

T: White Anglo-Saxon Protestant. [Laughs] A variety. Uh, the one family had uh, was originally Palatine German, way way way back. And the other family was originally pure Puritan English way way way back. And they more or less intermarried with you know, the, the Dutch and the other Palatine Germans and stuff. But it's, we're Wasps.

R: Umhm. Um, what, what did they do for um, a living? You remember? Do you know, or were you told? Do you remember?

T: It's right there on the wall.

R: They worked in the mills?

T: [Unclear] No, no. He own it. [R: Uh huh] That was my great great grandfather Holtz's grist mill and the flour mill.

R: Uh huh. Uh huh.

T: Uh, he however died young doing something deranged, which I've never been able to actually figure out. And my grandfather became a railroad engineer.

R: Uh huh. On the Boston, what became the Boston and Maine?

T: New York Central. [R: Uh huh] Um, the other, the other side of the family were, were farmers up until my grandfather's day. And he became a teacher and then later a post master of a post office, Noscotia Post Office, Noscotia, New York.

R: Uh huh. Um, do you remember your grandparents?

T: I remember my grandparents on one side very well. Um, they both lived up (--) Well my grandmother died when I was an adult. And my grandfather lived up until I was about fifteen or sixteen. On the other side, my grandfather died when I was a small child, but my grandmother lived till I was about twelve.

R: Do you remember any stories that your grandparents told you? Or the people from your grandparents generation, that is older than your parents generation, told you about their youth? I mean basically what I'm trying to do here is say, how far back can I push the oral tradition with you?

T: Uh, well actually you can push it back a long ways. My family is obsessed with genealogy. [R: Uh huh] For example, (--)

R: But I'm interested in knowing like directly, say for instance with anything that maybe your grandparents told you about their youth. That sort of thing.

T: Oh yes! Oh yeah, definitely.

R: Does anything stand out in your mind?

T: Uh, my grandmother met my grandfather at a uh, general store in Gardner, New York, where he was for some bazaar reason and she lived there. And she used to [few words unclear] about that. She would talk about you know, what it was like to be a young girl growing up in a real small town. And how it was difficult to meet men, but when you met men it was a much more natural thing than it is where she's putting it, in the 1950's nowadays. And uh, it was one of these

uh, pastoral uh, stories that you know, the real, what the 90, 1890's [R: about the 90's, right] were all about type of thing. [R: Uh huh] Uh, Eugene O'Neil's, "Our Wilderness", or something like that. In fact I, I've loved that play ever since, because every time I watch it I think of my grandmother who would have, who never saw it, but would have loved that play to death.

R: I worked, "To Take Me Along." [T: Uh, okay] [Laughs] That was actually the first play I worked in professional theater was "Take Me Along".

T: Oh, so that to her was the way things were back in Gardner. Of course her father owned most of Gardner. [R: Uh huh] So to her life was, life was great. [R: so that kind of gives you the respect] But it was you know, there were trees to climb and other (--) [R: Gazebos (laughs)] Gazebos, [unclear] and all that kind of thing. It was, it was, it was a great life. My grandfather used to uh, on my father's side apparently has a fairly unhappy childhood. So his stories tended to be a little darker, but he would have these very funny stories. Like he had a sister who kept cats, uh, many cats. Like about a hundred and twenty-six cats. So he would tell us many stories about, he put it, "the damn cats." But yeah, they, they told stories all the time. And then they would tell stories about their grandparents' [R: uh huh] childhoods. [R: Uh huh] I have a great great, umpty great Uncle Duncan who used to go fishing with two thousand dollars in his pocket. No one knows why. He finally drowned one day and they suspected foul play. But they fished him out of the [unclear] Hill River and he was still carrying the ten thousand dollars in his pocket. [Coughs] So you know, it goes back a long long way.

R: Um, you're talking about, this is your grandmother and man, and this sort of thing, it's sort of two things that always come up in, in this is sex and religion. Uh, did, did you have any kind of religious background?

T: You mean myself?

R: Yeah, when you were growing up.

T: Yeah, I was raised Baptist.

R: Uh huh. Uh, do you still practice that religion, or any religion?

T: I occasionally attend the Episcopal Church like about (--) Well I was raised Baptist and Episcopal. My father was Baptist, my mother was Episcopal. At some point after I got to be an adult they went into the Episcopal side. And uh, my wife is an Episcopalian and I attend her church. You know, the good two or three times a year Episcopalians. We go to the pancake supper and we go to uh, Christmas [R: uh huh], and I go to Easter, and that's about it.

R: Umhm. Um, how about you parents? Uh, where are they, where did they live?

T: Uh, Scotia, New York, in Schenectady County.

R: And where did they work?

T: My father worked uh, well he was a sales manager and a sales engineer in a variety of places. So we moved around some. Uh, my mother worked for a number of years at the uh, the local junior high school. And then after I had married and left the house, she had a job working for an electrical contractor as his office manager, which she still does off and on. He has her come in as a consultant. So actually I was raised over there, but we moved around a lot. I mean we lived in the Greater Boston area for awhile. We lived in a number of areas in Schenectady County. It always depended on which company he happened to be working for.

R: Um, where and when were you born?

T: I was born in Schenectady in 1943.

R: Uh, do you have any brothers or sisters?

T: Three sisters.

R: Where, where do you fit in this package?

T: I'm the oldest.

R: Uh huh. Um, where did you grow up? You said you moved around?

T: All over the place.

R: Where mostly. Is there any place in particular?

T: Uh, Scotia mostly, which is a bedroom community for Schenectady Uh, Winchester, Massachusetts. Medford, Massachusetts. Lexington, Massachusetts. That's about, yeah, that's about it.

R: Uh, when did you move to this area, and why?

T: 1972 by accident. I was working as a non-certified school teacher. And the state of New York decided they weren't going to give state-aid schools anymore that had non-certified school teachers working for them. So I came over to North Adams State to get my degree so I can be a certified school teacher. [R: Umhm] Uh, but I found out that the part time job I was doing at Sprague Electric was paying me more money than I would get as a beginning school teacher at that time. So I just kept on doing it.

R: Uh huh. Um, what were you doing at Sprague?

T: I was uh, I started off as a computer operator trainee. When uh, when they closed our department I was the senior computer operator on the third shift.

R: That was midnight to 8:00 a.m.?

T: Yeah, the graveyard shift.

R: Uh huh. Um, the, you uh, were working as a, uh, uncertified school teacher when you came here. Um, what was your, what was your first job? At all?

T: The first job I ever had? [R: Yeah] Uh, I was a shoe clerk. This is while I was in high school.

R: Where was that?

T: Schenectady [R: Uh huh] Dr. Scholls Foot Comfort Shop.

R: And uh, what, what was your first full-time job?

T: First full-time job. Um, [makes sounds with mouth] well I don't know. That was actually pretty close to full-time, but I don't think that you could count it. [R: Uh huh] I worked a lot of hours. Uh, the first full-time job I had was a uh, an output. Well no, I had a lot of [laughs] (--) The first full-time job I had was as a migrant bean picker actually.

R: Where?

T: Uh, upstate New York. [R: Uh huh] Migrating [laughs].

R: Well I did that.

T: But that didn't last very long.

R: I did that, I did that in South Jersey for about two days and that was it.

T: I didn't last much there. This was about a month. And these little old ladies were, [R: they could outdo you like crazy] you know, [rest of sentence unclear].

R: Did you notice that? You know that? [Laughing] [T: Comment unclear] They've been doing it for seventy years.

T: Yeah. You know, this is, geeze, this is kind of a romantic thing to do man. And I'm you know, [makes sound with mouth]. No, no, forget that. The first real job I had I suppose was, I was working for General Electric in Schenectady as uh, in a computer department as an output clerk. We had this gigantic main frame.

R: Where was that?

T: Um, the main plant in G.E.

R: Uh, and when was that?

T: 1966, '65.

R: And you were, what was your exact title?

T: I was an output clerk. [R: Uh huh] Uh, they had a giant main frame computer which [unclear] out output at tremendous speed and I was suppose to separate it, collate it and put it into the various boxes that [rest of sentence unclear].

R: What was, what was the physical nature of this output? Was it papers, or?

T: Oh yeah. Lots of print outs, [R: uh huh] computer print outs.

R: Uh huh. Um, how, how did you end up being a uh, teacher?

T: Well I, [laughs] that was the job I was having at the time. My teaching I actually studied for. What the hell is that?

R: It sounds like a woodpecker.

T: Yeah it is. It sounds like it's in my house. [R: Laughs] Never mind. Um, I, I also went to several colleges, but uh, what I ended up finally graduating in and studying most of the time was secondary english. Teaching secondary english.

R: Where did you get the balance of your credits?

T: Uh, the New [Paul's] State, [R: umhm] New [Paul's], New York, [R: umhm] and North Adams State College here. [R: Umhm] But uh, I was teaching in a parochial school [R: umhm] where I did not teach english. I taught whatever subjects the sisters who were assigned to the school that year did not have.

R: Everything but religion.

T: Exactly, everything but religion. [R: Yeah] Yeah. And uh, I never have for any length of time taught english.

R: They won't let the [unclear] teach religion. [Laughs]

T: Yeah. I taught gym a lot more than I've ever taught english. I had a, I have a degree, B.A. in english with a drama minor. [R: Uh huh] But uh, I've never really used it. To teach it anyway.

R: Uh, when were you married?

T: Which time?

R: [Laughs] I know about that too.

T: [Laughs] The first time in 19 uh, uh 1966. And the second time in of god, I should ask my wife, except she'll kill me. 1980?

R: Boy. [T: Comment unclear] We have a lot in common. We have a lot, we have a lot in common. We were born the same year and married the same years.

T: Uh, well [unclear] (--)

R: Although I've been, I've been divorced twice.

T: Well if I ask my wife what year we were married I may get divorced for a second time.
[Both laugh]

R: Um, do you have any children?

T: Uh, three. [R: Uh huh] [Unclear], my wife also has two by her previous marriage, but there's only one left who lives with us now. My youngest daughter.

R: So you came to work at Sprague in 1972, is that correct, or about that?

T: Yeah.

R: Okay. And you started as a computer trainee.

T: Computer operator trainee, right.

R: And uh, you um, you started at Marshall Street? [T: Yeah] And you, that's where you always were?

T: Building 1. That's the only place [R: uh huh] where they ever had their main frame computer. The computer room never moved.

R: And you worked, you worked there until it closed, until the operation closed?

T: Right.

R: Um, did you always work the same shift?

T: Usually. Um, there were occasions when I would take uh, somebody else's shift for short periods of time. But I was always the one who had the third shift, because I was one of the people that liked the shift and didn't bother wanting to change. Most people would go on third shift and they'd try to transfer to second. I hated second shift so I wouldn't transfer. Eventually I would have had enough seniority so I would have transferred to first shift, but our first shift operators, the three first shift operators that were there were the same three guys that were there when I was hired.

R: What did you like about first shift? Uh, sec (--) Third shift?

T: Um, basically nobody bothered you. [R: Yeah, that is a (--)] You were almost alone in the building. You were responsible for getting a certain amount of work out and you didn't have to put up with deranged interruptions, or people coming in and saying, "oh my got, we've got to change the priority on this," or anything like that. You had a set amount of, this is, this has to be done. However you feel like doing it is your business.

R: Did you catch any sleep?

T: Oh yeah, from time to time. I mean if we got everything done in three hours [R: yeah], sure. Which happened.

R: I, I worked third shift for General Motors for a time and sometimes I had to be on an assembly line and it was torture. But sometimes if I was on like in maintenance, or something like that it could be easier.

T: Now there were a lot of nights when you could for example uh, the schedule would be such that if you really wanted to push it you could get everything done in, by three o'clock in the morning. So if you then, [R: right] instead of walking around and pretending to be busy uh, [R: yeah, you didn't have to worry about it] you passed out on the chair, well then fine.

R: You have to worry (--) That was my experience with third shift too, is that you didn't have to worry about the foreman because they were always as tired as you. [Laughs]

T: Well that's, that's just it. For all [unclear] purposes I was the foreman. [R: Uh huh, uh huh] So right, no problems. Of course if you had a real busy schedule then you didn't have that opportunity, but that's when you earned your money. Most of the rest of the time is was really cut and dried and very simplified procedure.

R: Um, did? How? What was the nature of your job when you, when you first started it? I mean just sort of describe what you actually did physically?

T: Okay. Sprague had a main frame computer at the time. And IBM 360 uh, well they had two of them. And IBM 360-40 and an IBM 360-20. The 360 handled practically all of Sprague's business applications. We would do sales and billing, production control, accounts payable, accounts receivable. And most of the runs, the actually runs of these particular jobs would be done at night, because during the day they were receiving input to it. So once the input was all in by say eleven o'clock at night, then we would actually start the runs.

R: What, what does that mean?

T: Well for example, let's take one. Um, if we're doing an accounts payable run, during the day everybody is imputing. Uh, and they orig, originally was through keypunch cards and then later it was on disks. [R: Copy disks?] No. [R: 5 1/4? No.] Uh, well, on tape I should say. [R: Tape, yeah] Yeah. [R: 10 1/2 inch tape] Yeah. [R: Yeah] You would try and (--) They had a

whole complicated process toward the end. They would do it on floppy disk, which would go in and get [R: put on a disk] put on tape and on the tape would it be our actual input. [R: Right] We would deal with the big real to real tapes. [R: Umhm] But in the beginning it was cards [R: right], which would be put on to the reel to reel tape, which we would use as input. And then sometimes we would, one of the things we would do is put that tape directly on to a hard drive disk. [R: Umhm] But it, it varied from job to job. But the input from the accounts payable of that day would be coming in all through the day and through the evening by say ten o'clock, which would be a cut off point, it would all be in. So then it would actually enter into the run, which would figure up exactly what Sprague had in the way of accounts payable on any given day. Also it would constantly update the files so you could tell what it was doing you know, this month, this year, this quarter, the past five years, whatever somebody in the accounts payable department wanted to find out. And we would do a complete run of account payable, get a grand set of totals. This could print out a report and we would send a report down to the accounts payable department. Actually we'd stick it in a rack and they'd come and pick it up in the morning. [R: Uh huh] And we would do that for a whole series of jobs. We had uh, there was one of about eighteen different regular runs that we would have.

R: You, you uh, you mentioned that later on in the job that you were virtually the, the foreman in your department. Um, what was the nature of uh, supervision when you first started? Your supervision. What did your supervisors do and what was your relationship to the supervision?

T: Well when I first started I was a trainee. [R: Uh huh] So I was working on first shift. [R: Uh huh, you were working on the day shift] And you were (--) Yeah, they were more or less showing me [R: everything], yeah, what there was to know about the computer. Sort of. [Chuckles] It was, a lot of it was you picked it up as you stood there.

R: Uh huh, you sort of watched.

T: Yeah, you'd stand around to watch. And sooner or later you'd figure out what the hell was going on. [R: Uh huh] And a lot of it was cut and dry. There was uh, you know, a manual type of thing. You knew that you had to do (--) To create the accounts receivable report for example, you had to run the accounts receivable run. To do that you had to do the sales and billings run before that. [R: Uh huh] To do that you had (--) So everything was, was uh, you know, kind of a cut and dry procedure once you picked up the actual procedure that you had to follow. And also how to make the machine do that. There was a lot of uh, informal training as oppose to formal training. You can (--) I always used to maintain, if you gave me enough time I could teach a monkey to do it.

R: Um, could you? Do you remember when you first started at Sprague?

T: Yeah.

R: Uh, could, do you remember your feelings when you first started? Could you talk about that?

T: Uh, well I was also going to school at the time [coughs]. So my feelings were, oh my god! [Laughs] Uh, there are not enough hours in the day to get away with this. I mean I'm working

eight hours and I'm going to school eight hours, and I also was involved in extra curricula activities, so I was like sleeping four hours a day. So mostly my feelings at the time where I was real tired, [R: uh huh] a lot. Um, the job, the nature of the job was, which is one of the reasons I liked it so much, was so cut and dry that you didn't have to think. You could think other places where I did have to think. [R: Umhm] You could more or less go in and turn your mind off and become one with the machine, and just uh, you know hit the right button every now and then and the thing would flow.

R: This is very interesting, because you're the second person I've interviewed (--) I got forty interviews. I didn't interview them all, but you're the second person I've interviewed who said something like that. And it so happens that the other person happens to be roughly your age. The other person happens to be Ray Bass. I mean he's got a (--) [T: Yeah] And basically we got to talk. Because I've done um, production work a lot. I worked on an assembly line and that sort of thing. As a matter of fact I was an officer in an IUE LO. And uh, he got to talking about, he's a graduate of North Adams State also, in history and he got to talking about liking jobs that, where he didn't have to think. [T: Yeah] Because then you could put your mind in other places that were more important. And I think that um, I was struck by this because the sub-title of our project, our project is "Shifting Gears" and the sub-title is : "The Changing Meaning of Work in Massachusetts, 1920-1980." And I think that that's a very important aspect that I, I actually grilled him a little about it when he said it. He is the first person. That um, that is not a, (--) I'm not, I mean I'm not, I don't want to prejudices it, prejudice it with any sort of [prejurative?] language. But uh, it is not an attitude that I have found at least among older workers. This notion of you know, you can, you don't have to think of it, you can shut down. And that's great, that's the thing I like about the job. Because another way that he put it is like he didn't want to commit too much of himself to the company, which was, which I, which I found fascinating. Which I'm not sure that that's not true of older workers, but they would be less willing to admit it.

T: I think it's a matter of definition. When I was working at Sprague I never had to define myself as a guy, [R: as a Sprague worker] as a Sprague worker. [R: Right] Because that was what I did with my mind shut off. [R: Uh huh] I would define myself as an actor, [R: uh huh] or as a free-lance writer. At least to myself. [R: Right] You know, if somebody asked me "what do you do for a living"? "Well I, you know, I work at Sprague." "I run the computer there." But I never thought of myself particularly. Because I'd walk in at midnight, okay, I'd flick the switch, okay. [R: Yeah] And I'd walk out at eight o'clock and I would forget it. I would never take work home with me. It would just be (--0

R: Commitments are not necessarily to your, to the place that's paying you the most money.

T: Yeah, exactly. It isn't a question of (--) I think in Ray's case he might have a you know, a stronger feeling about the company, because he was involved (--)

R: He was a teacher too by the way. [T: Yeah I know] He had very similar experiences. [T: Yeah] He got, he got layed off. He was in New Hampshire and got layed off.

T: But he uh, he deals with the company, or dealt with the company at the same I was working

there, on a, on a more real basis. [R: Yeah] You know I was, I was there to put in my time, [R: umhm] make my paycheck, and get out. [R: Umhm, umhm] And then I would go back to the real world where I could do what I really wanted to do, [R: umhm] or not do what I really wanted to do. But that was real. [R: Uh huh] Sprague was eight hours of becoming one with a gigantic computer, [R: chuckles] and you know, basically keeping your mind off.

R: Right. Right. Um, what about other people in the department? I mean you talked about being a trainee first of all on the first shift where you were trained, and then you went on the third shift. But uh, did you work along side of other people, or did you supervise other people, or under other people? What was, what was your relationship with other people on the third shift?

T: There were three of us from time to time on the third shift. [R: Uh huh] There were times, there were some nights when you know, one operator would be running it all alone. But usually there were three people on the shift. One of them uh, usually the, the junior operator would run the peripheral equipment. And then there was another operator who ended up finally becoming a senior operator like me, who ran the machine also. But she would do (--) Sometimes it would switch around, but usually I would handle the console and she would handle the tapes and other things like that. Uh, it wasn't really a case of my supervising them, it was just that if, because none of us had any kind of a supervisor's reign. We were all hourly and we were all you know, [R: Uh huh] not management in any sense at all. But if crunch time came and somebody had to get called in, I was the one that had to make the phone call.

R: Right. Like a utility man or something.

T: I was responsible.

R: Right.

T: In other words, I was the, I guess you'd call me the responsible person on the shift. [R: Right] If uh, Virginia, who was one of the operators who worked with me for a number of years, got sick for example, she would tell me, "I'm going home now, you report it." Whereas if I got sick I would have to call somebody up and report it. So I guess I was, I was the responsible person in the group. In a hospital [few words unclear], or something.

R: So there was one, there was one woman, there was one woman on the shift doing similar work?

T: Well it, it varied. I was there for thirteen years. And most of the time people tried to get off the shift as soon as possible. [R: Uh huh] We had a lot of female operators. It was uh, it was about a fifty/fifty department.

R: Was that ever um, was that ever an issue? I mean I, I, (--) Uh, there was a point historically when unless you were a nurse it was, it was uh, frowned upon for women to work that shift. And I, I was wondering if that was ever an issue.

T: Not at Sprague. [R: No] No. Really. Besides, Virginia was an ex-marine. And uh,

literally. [R: Yeah] And uh, she never thought of it that way. [R: Yeah] Most (--) The funny thing about it was the, the oldest and most senior guys (--) [R: that's a large cat!] Yes, isn't he? He's a total coward. He's cute. Come on stupid, lie down and go to sleep again. He's afraid of squirrels and birds and every, and people and everything. He's, he's ridiculous. But uh, the three guys who were first shift operators were there the longest and they had seniority. So the best paying computer operators in our department were men. But by the time we finally shut down, I'd say the majority of operators in the department were women. And they were climbing the seniority reigns. Sprague never, that I ever saw, really ever did discriminate too much, [R: Umhm] except once you got up into the management levels. You were promoted on an hourly basis strictly on your efficiency. It didn't (--)

R: Even middle management, it's just only on top management that I, have I not seen any women. [T: Yeah] But certainly, and in the technical fields too, I can't find one woman engineer. But certainly uh, in the um, in the business end (--)

T: I think Sprague would have hired them.

R: If they were around. If they'd found them.

T: I really think they would have. If they had found them they would have hired them. [R: Yeah] They uh, once you got up in "Mahogany Row", [R: right] you didn't find any women. But the head of the payroll department for example was a women. [R: Uh huh] The middle management part of it. And uh, they got paid the same as we did. And they got the same raises we did. And they got the same merit judgements we did. And everything was the same. [R: Uh huh] They were not discriminatory. At least not until you started making enough money to count.

R: In production there was, because there was a kind of defacto discrimination in production, because they were (--) Ray was telling me that there were these A rated jobs, which were all the heavy jobs [T: Yeah] which men tended to you know, to take. So it created a kind of [unclear] defacto.

T: Yeah, in that sense. But in the office (--) See, I wasn't a member of Ray's Local. [R: Right] I was in the, the other union. The office union they called it. [R: Yeah. Uh huh] And uh, in the office union I think uh, women probably outnumbered men. [R: Yeah] And uh, they tended to have jobs just as good as the men's jobs, [R: umhm] if not better in some, you know, in some departments depending on where you work.

R: Although in the union itself, while there were women officers there was probably were a majority of women in both unions, but never, they were never the very top leadership. They were never president. President.

T: No, but I, I suspect some of that is a question of temperament. [R: Uh huh] I know my union president was president of the union the whole time I was there. [R: Walter?] Yeah, Walter. [R: Yeah] And it was just a question of nobody ran against him? [R: Right, right] So it wasn't just (--)

R: Tremendously respected.

T: I mean if a man had run against him, he would have got beat. If a woman would run against him she would have got beat. But they both would have got beat pretty well equally I think. [R: Right] The woman might have done better. [R: Right, right] Who knows?

R: Um, what about changes in wages, benefits, working conditions, things like that? Do you have any comments about that during your tenure? What, what, what you thought of wages? Especially those areas of wages, benefits and working conditions.

T: Well um, they changed obviously over the period I was there. But all of that was, was just a very gradual things. You're, (--) I have been told, I never checked it, that we were getting paid considerably below industry scale. [R: That's true.] But on the other hand I know for a fact that we were getting paid in my department better than other Sprague plants. [R: Uh huh, that's true too] because we used to run payroll. And I would take a look at it from time to time. Uh, what are the guys down in [unclear] getting? Oh my god, I don't believe this! And uh, you know, we, for North Adams we were, we were doing all right. [R: Umhm] The benefits were not outstanding, but compared to other company's benefits, they were superb.

R: But you, you worked around different places too. What about working conditions?

T: A computer room is a computer room. [R: Uh huh] It's, it's a hermetically sealed environment. I mean Sprague's was low wage.

R: They keep it healthy for the computers, not the workers. [Laughs]

T: Yeah. Sprague's uh, (--) I worked in other computer rooms and Sprague's was a very low-tech, low-rent looking, tacky looking computer room. But on the other hand, it was, it was climate controlled. [R: Umhm] And it was secure. And uh, the machinery at least was very pleasant to look at, because we had you know, decent looking IBM computers even though they used to paint the walls this putrid shade of yellow. [R: Umhm] But uh, you know, it was a (--) I would say, except with the possible exception of the toner that we had to put in the IBM 3800, when we finally got that thing, it was a, a safe pleasant place to work. On a hot summer night it was a damn pleasant place to work I'll tell you straight.

R: Yeah. Uh huh, uh huh.

T: You'd walk in there and it's about ninety-five and hundred percent humidity. And bang, you're in this [sighs]. The machine got hot and the machine went down, so they had very good air conditioning.

R: Right, right. Um, what about promotions, pay increases, that sort of thing? Were they, were they sort of regular, expected and (--)

T: More or less. [R: Yeah] There was always (--)

R: Those were not issues when you were there?

T: Well the people would bitch about it. I mean there were a couple of guys who got all sorts of bazaar promotions. I think basically because, they got kicked upstairs because management didn't want them on their regular job because they were screw ups. But I mean that's a subjective opinion. It happens to be mine. [Both laugh] I'm sure if you ask them, they'd say, "yes, I received my expected promotion and everything was fine."

R: Uh huh. Well that's a relief. [Unclear]

T: They had a, they had a fairly, they had a fairly consistent policy. And they did give you opportunities if you wanted to. For example, they gave three of us the programmer's test one time if we wanted to advance to programmer. And I took the programmer's test and decided that only insane people would ever want to be programmers. And said, "no, I don't want to do this." [R: Uh huh] It's, it was like sitting in a cubical and doing math homework for eight hours. [R: Yeah (laughs)] So, but they did, they did give us that opportunity. And uh, we had a steady, which is mostly under union contract, but we had a steady progression where you'd go up the scale on these merit increases and get more money and a higher job rating. And eventually, like I said, I started off as a rank junior trainee, and I ended up as the senior console operator for the shift. Which over thirteen years doesn't seem like much, but when you don't do anything whatsoever to particularly strive to be promoted, and you get promoted that way anyway, you're following your regular hierarchy.

R: Um, what about um, the, do you know, were you aware of what computers were used for the technical side of the business for you know, for all of the math? Was that, did, was that (--)

T: That was ours. [R: Oh yeah?] Yeah.

R: When was that used? Was there a time sharing thing, or(--)

T: Well the, the uh, the computer system itself was gradually upgraded. [R: Uh huh] By the time we closed down they were doing and IBM 4341. Um, (--)

R: What happened to these machines?

T: Some of them were leased, in which case they'd go back to the store. [R: Uh huh] And uh, it was like trading in a car when they would buy something. I mean you'd take the old 360 and you'd say, "well give me the latest model." [R: Right] Or with Sprague it wouldn't be the latest model, it would be the two year old model. [R: Laughs] So okay, we'll take away your 36040 and we'll bring you a 37145. Okay? And the payments will only be an extra so and so a month. So they'd shuffle around and bring in a new computer. And the maintenance guys would get it all screwed up and everything would be hell for two months. Then we'd iron bugs out of it and things would go on again for another two years. And we had to upgrade the system again. But uh, all of the IBM 360 and 370 series on up are multi-processing units. So if I'm doing job control job on one side, I can be doing something else on the other side. They would run jobs

simultaneously. So we could be doing business applications here and we would be doing these jobs that we used to call mass services, [R: umhm] which were actually stuff from the research department. They would be, they would send over stuff and we would do that. Uh, I imagine toward the end when we started getting into mini computers and microprocessing and all of that kind of stuff, that what was left of the research department, which wasn't much, [R: everybody got their own PC or something] would get their own PC or something like that, with which they could monkey around. But for a long time they would use a portion of our machine simultaneously with the business applications to do actual research. [R: Umhm, umhm] Some of which was pretty weird. [R: laughs]

I remember one time I printed out one just for the hell of it and it was the first act of Hamlet. I have no idea why, but the guy wanted a print out in code of the first act of Hamlet. Well I cracked the code. [R: Laughs] So I did the print out to see what it actually was. And it's the first act of Hamlet. So I just uncracked the code and shift in the symbols [laughs] and let it go like that. But I'm, finally all I got was, "what the hell do they want with that?" Maybe it was just to see if the code worked. I don't know.

R: Um, so we talked about the structure and organization of the work place. You're saying basically you had three people that you worked with.

T: Well that was on my shift. Now the computer department was a much more uh, elaborate thing than my shift. We were sort of a, just a fragment there of. The entire computer department was actually a you know, a fairly major department of Sprague. We processed everything from all of the, all the Sprague plants. So I'm just giving you the picture as seen by a guy who worked the night shift. It was considerably more elaborate than that. There were a lot more people for example on first shift. [R: Umhm, umhm] A lot more. And they're even more people on second shift.

R: [Coughs] What about your personal relationships at work and your interaction with co-workers? I mean at one level you're saying, well you sort of just came there and worked and you had uh, you had another agenda for your life. Uh, did you develop any friendships, any ongoing friendships on the job, or close(--)

T: Casual ones. I mean we still (--) There are guys who used to work there who are, who still do work there in a couple of cases, that when we meet each other on the street we talk, [R: uh huh] but we don't you know, we don't hang out together. [R: Uh huh] And uh, Sprague was like that. A lot of people in our depart (--) in our department anyway, not necessarily in the other departments, was not a real tight knit place. Uh, there were some guys who were good friends off work, but there were other guys who you know, we'd come in and say "hi". And usually I would be saying "hi" to the second shift as I come in. They're saying "hi" to me as they leave and that's it. That was the extent of our relationship. There wasn't much overlap between shifts.

R: So you would say your closest friendships in the area were off the job? Developed off the job?

T: Oh yeah, definitely. Yeah, definitely.

R: Um, what uh, you mentioned some kind of changes that happened while you were on the job, technical changes and that sort of thing when they brought in new main frames or that sort of (--) Uh, were these uh, were these the major changes that you can recall during your tenure there of the work process or of the structure of the job? New machinery?

T: Well yes and no. Uh, there were, they were always upgrading the system, because they were constantly asking the system to do more things. But at the same time, again this is subjective, but I got a real feeling that the place was degenerating. Because the programmers who were there and assistant analysts who were there originally when we started upgrading the systems were actually pretty good, or at least in my opinion. And toward the end, uh, it was a joke. [Chuckles] They, they did not know what they were doing. They really didn't. Systems would (--) When I say systems, I mean a system of jobs together to make up a group of jobs. [R: Uh huh] A job system like mini whip. We had this thing called mini whip. Mini work in progress. I don't know why they called it that, but it was a series of linked jobs which supposedly gave management some kind of tool to tell them what we're doing.

R: These were time, time study men or something doing this?

T: God knows. I don't, I (--) This is something we did. We sent a report out. I don't know where it went, who got it, and I don't want to know why. But the system itself would keep disintegrating. The programmer who had designed it had gone on to bigger and better things, which most Sprague programmers did. Or worse and lower things which a lot of them did too. And uh, the system was just disintegrating, would break up every night. It, it (--) A system is not just a series of things, it's almost an entity.

R: It's organic, yeah.

T: Yeah, it's organic. And this thing was, this thing was in brain deaf. It was dying. [R: Uh huh] And no one knew how to fix it.

R: So things like that made you job more difficult?

T: Oh yeah! [R: Yeah] Yeah. Well there wasn't a question of necessarily making it, my job more difficult, because there was nothing I could do about it. So I would call some poor bastard programmer up at three o'clock in the morning and tell him he's got to come in and you know, keep this thing held together long enough for me to get through it. So he would come in and do that. [R: Uh huh] Toward the end there was an awful lot more of that. [R: Uh huh, uh huh] And also the uh, the changes would tend to be mistake changes. Like they would put in a new system and forget to put an air conditioner over it. So for two months you would have the doors of the CPU opened with a World War II surplus fan blowing air on the thing so it wouldn't over heat and die just because they didn't design it properly. And when we went to the law and distance data links, we started (--)

R: This is great stuff. [T: We started processing] This is engineers, right? [Laughs] That's it!

T: Yes. I always called them the walkie (--)

R: The guy's got his MS from MIT, right? [Laughing]

T: Yeah. I always called them the walkie talkie assholes to tell you the truth. There would be some poor bastard with a wrench in there and he's doing the actual thing. And there's five guys standing there with walkie talkies on them, communicating with each other about, you know, somewhere else about something, I don't know what. But the one guy is you know, doing all of the work. And finally he'd get it done and he'd go out. Then you'd find out well it's eight feet further west than it's suppose to be. So then the five guys with the walkie talkies would be back and the one guy with the wrench. And then we're moving it over. This went on for two months. [R: Yeah] When I went (--)

R: [Unclear] guy with a white shirt comes up and then a guy for the machine shop comes up and fixes it, right?

T: Yes, exactly. [R: Yeah, right (laughing)] And then we went to this long distance data link, where we were not actually running hardware anymore, we were running a screen. The hardware was located in Orlando, Florida at Martin Marietta.

R: So you're wired through a satellite, or?

T: Uh, wired. [R: Uh huh] All the way up the coast. And for some reason they had a lot of storms in Princeton, New Jersey that summer. Every time they would have a storm in Princeton, New Jersey it would knock the link off. So we would be like down for eight hours, which had never used to happen before. Uh, the guy that implemented this brilliant program that was going to save the company money was at the time the head of the department. Then all of a sudden he became co-head of the department. [R: Laughs] Then all of a sudden he wasn't there anymore. And uh, I think they finally got rid of the thing with Martin Marietta and this is after we closed though. Then they moved the facility and went back to having their own hardware again. But for you know, like about a year it was this other deranged thing. We'd get these weird shit on the screen. [R: Yeah] And we'd call up Orlando. We're calling up Orlando like about every forty-five minutes. For awhile there I just had an open phone line to Orlando. I was on the phone all night. Eight hours I had the phone off the hook talking to the guy in Orlando. And uh, he'd say, "well uh, I don't know."

R: This is a modum kind of computer?

T: Yeah. But a lot of it was sim (--) Yeah, it was a modum phone, but I mean it was, it was a real phone. [R: Yeah, right] You know, dialing it and everything. Uh Jim! Uh, no. Jim is in the other room. I was just talking to Jim a minute ago. Well uh, sorry, we'll have to transfer the call. Uh, Jim. Oh yeah, yeah. How come you hung up? I didn't hang up Jim. [Chuckles] But anyway Jim, as long as he got you the phone, how come I'm not getting any work out of the machine? Well Thurm, there's a storm someplace. I think in Princeton, New Jersey. And we can't get anything through to you, and this stuff. So finally they got rid of him. [Both laugh] Not Jim, I mean the guy that [R: designed the system] implemented this whole garbage. Uh, and things like that the last couple of years were (indemic). They used to happen all of the time.

R: Is there anything that stands out as like the biggest single change on the job?

T: It didn't change an awful lot. [R: Uh huh] I mean the room never changed. Along, before I got there, along the time of the strike, building one used to open on the street. [R: Umhm] Used to have windows. And because of that strike I think they were afraid of rocks through the windows damaging the delicate machinery. [R: They sealed them up.] They bricked them all up. [R: Right, yeah] And it became a hermetically sealed room. [R: Uh huh, yeah. It's interesting.] And uh, they would repaint it every couple of years. But they would always repaint it more or less the same color. [R: Umhm] And they would shift some of the machinery around, when they got bigger machinery. But it was always a big IBM beast. And they all basically look alike. So over a thirteen year period uh, the room never really changed. Or if it would change, it would change so gradually that it was not something that you know, [snaps fingers] really stood out in your mind as, oh my god, on this day, such and such a thing occurred. Because it would be, oh well, they moved the thing over four feet. And then next month they might move something else in and take something else out. And you know, it never really changed that much. It was like going into a time warp in a way.

R: [Laughs] Um, just a little change of pace. Uh, (--)

SIDE I ENDS

SIDE II BEGINS

Side II begins the informant in mid sentence:

T: in the morning and there wasn't anyplace to get anything to eat. [R: Uh huh] So uh, we would usually go down to the cafeteria which had machines.

R: Was that running?

T: It wasn't (--) No, the cafeteria wasn't running, but the machines would be running. You know, they had a coke machine and a snack machine. And way way down in building, whatever the hell it was, they had a sandwich machine. So you'd go down there and pop quarters in it and pop out a sandwich and uh, you know, a bag of fries and, or potato chips and a coke. And you'd sit there in the dark cafeteria and eat your lunch.

R: That's one of the things I would have liked to get more information about, the people who patronized it. Because as far as I can figure out when it was running the cafeteria on Marshall Street was probably the busiest restaurant in North Adams.

T: Oh yeah. During the day it was. There were several times I was in there you know, for, for some reason or other during the day and that place was always, always had a crowd. [R: Yeah] It was a cafeteria style. [R: Umhm] And uh (--)

R: I have a picture of it when it first opened.

T: Yeah, it was a busy place. [R: Yeah] But at four o'clock in the morning [R: yeah] uh, usually there might be like two of us there. [Chuckles]

R: Umhm. Were there any other uh, departments, besides the plant guards, were there any other departments functioning that you're aware of?

T: Off and on. Um, (--)

R: Probably some maintenance people I would (--)

T: They'd be the odd maintenance person wandering around. And way down in the other end, depending on what year it was, or depending on what time of year it was, depending on what, if there was some extra work or something in, there might be a third shift in some building.

R: Like a production shift?

T: Oh yeah, production shifts. Yeah, there were, there were third shift production workers. [R: Uh huh] But it would depend on what, when, where?

R: Umhm. Um, what's the funniest thing that happened to you when you, while you were at Sprague?

T: The funniest thing that happened to me while I was at Sprague. Um, I don't know. There weren't that many funny things that happened to me while I was (--). There were a lot of funny things that happened to me while I was working at Sprague, but they didn't happen at Sprague. The funniest thing I think that happened was every year. It was the same thing. If you ever get a hold of a copy of it you ought to read it. They would post this notice around Christmas time about Christmas parties. It is one of the nastiest, violist notices you ever saw in your life. It practically threatens you with death and dismemberment if you ever even speak to anybody on the day before Christmas. And I would come into work and that notice would go up. And I would snicker about it and point it out to everybody else and say, "what the hell do they think you're planning on doing, you know, the last day of work before Christmas?" "Getting drunk and rioting, or what?" And he never changed it. Diodati wrote it. [R: Laughs] And he never changed it. It was the same damn notice every year I was there. And it more or less said (--)

R: I'll have to ask him for it. I'm sure he's got it. [Laughs]

T: Yeah. He more or said, you are not to exchange greetings; you are not to leave your work station; and basically you are not to smile; you are not to pass go; you are not to collect two measly dollars. [R: Laughs] It was like, it was like something that was written directly by Ebenezer Scrooge. [Tape malfunctions for a few seconds. Informant begins in mid-sentence] Burns found all of this union hostility. [R: a lot of people (--)] A lot of union rank and file think they have been betrayed over the years by their union presidents. And they may like the concept

of the union okay, [R: right] but those bastards that run the place, a lot of them feel worse about them than they ever felt about anybody in management.

R: Um, do you (--) So this is often hard to place um, subjectively. But how do you think your attitudes about the job and about Sprague changed over the years while you were working for them? If at all?

T: They didn't really. [R: Uh huh] Um, it wasn't(--) The problem is, see, while I was working at Sprague I was not introspective about Sprague at all. Like I said, I was [R: uh huh] the switch was off. [R: Indifferent, yeah] When I was there I was one with the machine. When I was not there I was thinking about something else. Uh, and I was not working on third shift. I was not part of the general grapevine, or office gripe session where we would sit around and discuss the way things used to be, or the way things ought to be, or the way things (--) I had certain ideas about that. But I mean i figured what I say is going to make no difference what so ever, so why don't I keep my mouth shut and stay out of trouble and save it for when it counts. Once the place closed, uh, then you could actually sit back and think. You know, what, what actually was going on here? And that's when my attitudes about the place I wouldn't say changed especially, but I was able to articulate them.

R: To what degree? This came up before, but I'll just ask you. Um, to what degree do you think though your sort of indifference is um, when you say you weren't introspective, uh, with what degree do you think that may be gender related?

T: I don't know. I don't think (--)

R: I just, I have a hunch about, I mean I'm just thinking about do women, are women more introspective about these things than men generally? I mean that there are a lot of(--)

T: Oh okay. [R: uh huh] I see your point. Um, I don't (--) Well see the trouble is I (--)

R: You think you're kind of sort of [unclear]?

T: Yeah. I uh, I was not ever what you'd call really a typical Sprague employee, [R: Uh huh] which is one of the you know, one of the problems when I speak about Sprague. Because I, I would speak about the company and I think what I'm saying is that I'm articulating the feelings of what other people who worked there felt. [R: Yeah] Okay. But I, at the same time there's always the thing in the back of my head going, well actually that's bullshit, you know, because you really weren't a typical Sprague employee. [R: Uh huh] You more or less refused deliberately to be a typical Sprague employee. So how can you speak for you know, typical Sprague employees who might have been thinking something else all along. I don't know. It could be a gender thing, but I think in my case it was just personal. [R: Umhm, umhm] Sprague was there to provide me with money. [Unclear]

R: I uh, I do this. One of the things I'm doing on the project is I'm having, I have this reading group. We read books, literature about work of which there is very little. Um, and um, the

group is disproportionately female. And I brought this up there in the group. And that was one of their hunches, was, they said, why him? Why [unclear]. Some of them were ex-production workers, some, a couple of them were laid off from Sprague. And I said, "how come more men don't do this?" I mean it's not like that this is sort of the, the intelligencia of North Adams, or you know, or the, that sort of thing. They're (--) It's a cross section, but it's overwhelmingly female. And they said that they thought that women were more introspective of [unclear].

T: Well from what I, from what I did see on the times when I was spending time on other shifts. [R: Umhm] If there were people discussing something that the company was doing, or something about the way they felt about work, or something like that, it was usually a group of women. [R: Umhm] If a bunch of men were together and talking, you know, we had a break or something, they would tend to talk about uh, it's trout season. [R: Yeah.] Okay, or uh, some guy had a new four wheel drive truck and the guys would want to talk about it. You know, "well where did you go with the thing?" "I mean, how does it work in the mud?" On the other hand the women would be standing over there saying, "well I heard that there's going to be a cutback [R: yeah] in the [unclear] department." "And I heard this from so and so." [R: Yeah] Now there were men and a lot of the union guys particularly [R: right] who would immediately seize on this and want to talk about it. But there are a lot of guys who just, the hell with it. I want to talk to Vince about his new four wheel drive truck. I won't care if they're laying off the entire [unclear] department.

R: It's really (--) It's, this is really interesting and ironic. I haven't developed it much, but I think this is really true of, of, when I think about it now, most of the men I've interviewed. That this is true. That you know, you talk about what (--) Even men who were union guys, you know? Ray Bass say, "I just want to sit home and read history books, I don't want to do this." And Jack Boulger says, "Um, I really like to go hunting. I'm not a very gregarious person." I says, "what the hell are you doing leading a union?" Uh, and uh, and it's, you know, and the, and the women it's not even particularly their conscience. It's like women will turn around and say, "well women, we don't primarily get our identity from the job." But nevertheless they would have more to say about it than the men. So that is curious.

T: Yes. [R: Um] But I'm a, I'm really a lousy person to ask, because in my case it was deliberate. [Unclear]

R: Well see, I, I think that, that what I would say about that is that nobody is typical and everybody is typical. Everybody has their own story.

T: Yeah, this is true.

R: Um, let me see. Oh yeah. What was the hardest part of your job?

T: On a day to day basis there wasn't really one. It would depend on what would happen. The hardest part was disasters. What to do when disaster strikes? Which is always happening in a computer department.

R: And that usually entailed calling somebody up in the middle of the night?

T: Well sometimes it was calling somebody up, but sometimes you couldn't get them. And sometimes you had to fix it yourself, or try to fix it yourself. Or work out some deal with somebody or other who would come in and do something about it if you did something else for him. Or you know, all of this nonsense. But (--)

R: Was this stressful?

T: No, it wasn't stressful. That part of it was actually fun. The problem was when this thing would actually start to break it was like an illness. [R: Uh huh] You had to diagnose. [R: Uh huh] And uh, if you diagnosed correctly you could catch the thing before severe damage was done. If you diagnosed incorrectly, or if you just didn't diagnose in time, then severe damage could be done and then all hell breaks loose in the morning and everybody is wandering around screaming and yelling and tearing their hair out. Even though there wasn't an awful lot you could do about it. Most of the stuff was cut and dry. If the machine decided to do something dreadful it was going to do it and there wasn't really a damn thing you could do about it.

R: What, what was, what was the most enjoyable part of the job?

T: The most enjoyable part of the job? Um, the most enjoyable part of the job was the satisfaction of doing eight hours work in three, and then going to sleep for three hours. You sort of felt (--)

R: See I don't think you're an atypical. [Laughs]

T: Well it was like, it was like playing in a, playing a game. I can beat this machine man. I can beat it. I can make it work faster than it wants to and then I can take five hours off. [R: uh huh] But to take the five hours off you had to beat the machine. [R: Right] Okay. So on nights like that it would be fun. [R: Uh huh] You're actually, it was almost like playing cards against a, [R: right] or playing chess against a computer. [R: Uh huh] I'm snuckering you sucker and now I get to do what I want.

R: Um. You, you say you didn't really have any direct supervision while you were on the job.

T: No, very little.

R: But you must have had some relationship with supervision and with management. And what was that relationship and what was your attitude toward supervisors and managers on the job?

T: Uh, really I didn't. I mean it, the only time there was any direct supervision was when there was a crisis. In which case the supervisors weren't busy supervising, they were busy tearing their hair out and commiserating and problem solving, and all sorts of stuff like that. When there was a crisis we would have supervisors in the computer, but we were, the operators were more or less [coughs] told to go get a cup of coffee while the higher intelligencias solve the problem. So we would. [R: Uh huh] The uh, it was in that particular department, which is not you know, typical of production, but in that particular department it was supervision by neglect really. If you were

doing your job correctly you could tell, because no one ever talked to you.

R: Um. Did you ever experience or, yourself, or see direct, directly with other people any conflict with management?

T: Oh yeah. There would be arguments all of the time. They were mostly on first shift. I'd catch them you know, like five minutes before I went out the door. Between eight and eight thirty there were lots of flare ups. [R: Uh huh] I had very few myself. I think I had one knock down, drag out shouting match with a supervisor that, over where he thought I should have done something, and I thought that if I had done that something there would have been other disasters. So the two of us yelled at each other for awhile and then I went home. [R: Um,] But you know, the next day it was all cleared up. Everybody (--) It just blew over. The next day there was another crisis to solve.

R: Uh, did you have any childcare responsibilities while you were working? [T: Yeah] And how did you deal with that?

T: Uh, well my sleep schedule was such that I would go to work at midnight, come home at eight, go to bed and get up about four o'clock in the afternoon. And from four to five, actually from three to five some years, I was more or less responsible for the kids being home. I had semi-latch key children. They would let themselves in knowing I was in the house, also knowing that if they woke me up an hour earlier they were going to catch holy hell. So they were suppose to you know, do something very quiet for an hour. Like do their homework, or watch TV with the sound down low, or whatever. And then the alarm clock would go off about four and I'd come staggering out in the living room and say, "oh God, where's my coffee?" But, and then I'd, we'd do whatever we did until about five o'clock when my wife got home. It varied from year to year. But uh, sometimes.

R: Yeah. Um, judging from what you said, I have a hunch of how you're likely to answer this. But what was your relationship to the union while you worked at Sprague?

T: I attended the contract meetings every three years. [R: Uh huh] There was no way that I could really attend regular union meetings. Not with my schedule. They were always on Monday nights.

R: What are your attitude toward the, towards the unions? I mean do you think they're, they're good, bad, or are you indifferent to them? Or were you indifferent to the union then?

T: I was indifferent to them when I worked there.

R: Uh huh. You weren't, you were not against it though?

T: No. No. I figured we had a, I figured we had a union that unless something really bazaar happened it was not going to get [unclear] no matter what. [R: Uh huh] And unless something really bazaar happened it was not going to fold up and go away. It was a fact of life like the company. [R: Umhm] I mean you paid your union dues and the union worked at it a little bit

and got you more money at contract time.

R: Um, did you ever involve yourself in any work related recreation or social gatherings, or anything like that?

T: We used to have a Christmas party uh, once a year that I sometimes used to go to. [Chuckles] And then again sometimes not. Uh, that was about it.

R: Do you think work at Sprague affected your marriage, your home life, your friendships, or your community involvement in any particular way?

T: Physically to some extent it always did of course, because I was uh, well I don't know really. Because I tried to arrange my schedule so that I was like a normal person. I just worked at night and slept during the day. And the evenings were my own. I don't think it did to any tremendously extent.

R: Um, I'm aware of your extra curricula involvements. Now while you worked at Sprague, I mean and I also know that as you pointed out you were going to North Adams State. After you graduated from North Adams State, while you were still working at Sprague, were you involved in any sort of community groups of any kind?

T: Oh God, yes.

R: And what were they?

T: Uh, community theater, various groups. Uh, sports groups, church groups, community groups and play bridge.

R: So you were active in, you were active in church groups?

T: You know when I was in the, I went to the Unitarian Church for awhile. I was the Program Director there for three or four years. [R: Uh huh, uh huh, uh huh] Oh yeah. Yeah. And uh, actually I've done a few things with the Episcopal Church since I've been going there. [R: Uh huh] We do a Christmas, we did up until three years ago a Christmas reading, or a Christmas production, or something like that. Yeah. The wide, the whole spectrum I mean.

R: What sort of sports things did you do?

T: I coached a soccer, [R: uh huh] little, kids soccer [R: uh huh] for three years until my son got too old to play kids soccer anymore. And I still go to track meets and my daughter is on the track team, and stuff like that. Uh, theater mainly. On a good night we're out three or four nights a week either, I'm either reviewing a show or directing a show, or acting a show, or doing something like that.

R: What's your favorite kind of theater?

T: Off beat nasty comedies. [R: Uh huh] [Name unclear], Kurt [Bonnigan?], uh, guys like that. [R: Um] [Comment unclear].

R: Tell me what it was like right before they shut down Marshall Street, or whatever that means to you. I mean in terms of as it's beginning to sort of (--)

T: A Chinese fire drill. No one knew what was going on. There were rumors all over the place. Everybody was wandering around in various deranged ways, not reacting to the situation well. Nobody knew what was happening.

R: When did you (--) How far (--) How much lead time did you have before you were [unclear]?

T: About five months.

R: And what was that like? What, were you called?

T: Chinese, it was a Chinese fire drill.

R: Were you, were you sent a letter, or were you called into the office, or (--)

T: We were, well first we heard rumors for a couple of months. And then they confirmed the rumors by, they had the departmental meeting. And then we got formal notifications of this, and formal notifications of that, and you know these memos. And then we have memos revising the memos. And then we had a departmental meeting revising the memo and the departmental meeting. And then I finally said, "the hell with this". And I had three weeks vacation coming, so my last three weeks with the company were in Maine on the company time. I took all of my vacation at once. [R: Uh huh] So I, I was suppose (--) My termination date was September 1st, but I actually left sometime in the middle of August. I just said, "look, I got three weeks vacation coming, right?" They said, "well yes." "Now". [Laughs] So the last night I just, "see you, bye!" [Laughs] I was gone.

R: You couldn't have taken that when you got layed off huh? Is that what (--)

T: I would have lost it. [R: Uh huh, uh huh] So I figured the hell with it. Take it now man.

R: Uh huh. [T: Get it done with] So you didn't know what it look like as it, as it sort of was unraveling. Everybody [comment unclear].

T: Well no. Theoretically the, the way the computer department was going I could have taken my three weeks, come back on maybe (--) You don't want to play with the microphone. Come back on September 1st and found that we'd been extended to the first of January, or something like that. [R: Yeah, umhm] As it turned out, we weren't, but I was, I was sick and tired of you know, everyday there was a different thing. [R: Right] The computer room moved to uh, what the hell is the name of that town? Marshfield, [R: Uh huh] on Route 495. And they were offering some people jobs in Marshfield and they were offering other, not offering other people

jobs.

R: Did this have to do with seniority?

T: No.

R: Just do everything [T: really] they wanted.

T: What they felt like. [Laughs] Uh, and originally they were offering no operators jobs. They were offering programmers jobs. Well they offered the programmers that they thought were the best programmers the jobs. But most of them didn't take them for various reasons. And they had more or less told everybody that they were offering the best programmers the jobs. So the programmers who did not take the jobs, like eight or nine of them, they then turned around and started offering these jobs to other programmers whom they had already more or less, flat out said, [R: you're not good enough] well you certainly are not good enough to be there, but well now we've changed our mind. And the operators were originally offered no jobs at all. The operating supervisor was, but no, none of the operators were. So then they called us in and they said, "well look, uh, we can't offer you jobs down there, but we can offer you consulting jobs". In other words, you'll be a consultant for us.

R: Tell some other person how to do your job. [Laughs]

T: It gets more interesting than that. How long? Well indefinitely. You know, like for maybe three or four years. Maybe. And I was offered one of them. That's when I decided the whole thing was crazy and I said "yeah, for you know, for like a hundred bucks a day, and you put me up, and per diem and everything else, I might consider it man." "Other than that, don't talk to me." And some of the guys were nastier than that. But [chuckles] he was, he was nuts. It was a Chinese fire drill. No one new really what they were doing. And uh, that was the way the whole thing went. Because unlike a production line, the computer operation thing at the time was in the middle of this Martin Marietta long distance data link thing. And it was in total disarray. No one was really in charge. And there wasn't really any hardware you could hang on to up here anyway. It was all being done over the data links. So [funny noise] all they new was they had to get the work out and they didn't know how to do it. Because they found out the operators they were hiring down there didn't (--) [Phone ringing in background].

R: Do you have a phone call?

T: [Comment unclear] I don't know why. But anyway. Um, it was, it was a Chinese fire drill. It was just nuts.

R: So how, how did you feel about this? I mean what were your (--)

T: Well I was, I found it kind of exciting actually. It was the first time anything really important had ever happened in thirteen years. [Both chuckle] I felt this (--) I had been (--)

R: You must have a nice cushion then?

T: Well no. I'm a fatalist. I've always ended up in places where life has directed me. And I ended up at Sprague for thirteen years more or less because I fell into it. And I decided that the gods had decided I was no longer going to be there anymore and something else was in the wind. And woe! [R: Let's see what happens] This is interesting. This is you know, this is kind of exciting. Here I've been sitting here, I've been basically you know, putting in my time at this for thirteen years. And now I can't do it anymore. Woe! But a lot of other people were seriously upset.

R: So what's the matter with MoCA in the five minutes?

T: What's the matter with MoCA in five minutes. Uh, MoCA is [unclear] I suspect. MoCA is Tom [Krens?] covering a new form of power for himself in the museum industry.

R: Well that's what the New York Times says.

T: Yeah, I agree with them.

R: You read that article.

T: I know Tom Krens. [Laughs] And I think she got it pretty close to being right. But that's not the real problems with MoCa. I mean guys want to go power hungry and do stuff like that, well then that's it. [R: Yeah] But no one yet has ever really done a sociological study on what the affects of gentrification are going to be before someplace gets gentrified. Nobody walks into a neighborhood and says, "where are you guys going to go once you can't live here anymore?" "What are you going to do?" "What's going to happen?" "What's going to happen to the neighborhood?" "What's going to happen to the neighborhood?" "What's going to happen to the real estate values?" "What's going to happen to the prices?" "What's going to happen to the people?" They do feasibility studies, "will this sucker work?" And uh, if you're in Haymarket in Boston and they decide to gentrify you neighborhood, well all right, you pack up and you move to Scully Square. Or you move to Roxbury. Or you move someplace. But if they gentrify your neighborhood in North Adams, where the hell are you going to go?

R: They talk about making River Street the Fifth Avenue.

T: Yeah, exactly. Well where are the people who are living on River Street going to go?

R: Just the lowest income housing in the city.

T: Yes. It's a slum basically. It's a nice you know, compared to Roxbury, [R: but] or South Bronx, it's a nice slum, but it's a slum.

R: In the early feasibility studies that Maynard Seider showed me, they used two models. And the irony of the two models is incredible. Because I happen to be from New Jersey and the models they used was the river front in Camden, New Jersey and Atlantic City. Now if you've ever been to Atlantic City, I mean you might not like all of the glitter and everything, but you

have this Boardwalk with all of this expense and glitter and flash, and all that sort of thing. And two blocks in from the Boardwalk are some of the worse slums in North America. [T: Yeah] Uh, and they've actually gotten worse [T: since they put the Boardwalk] since the, since they came, since they came in. So you have the, it's not just the extremes, they literally have gotten worse, because what's happened is there's less low income housing, because they you know. [Laughing]

T: Not only that, but you're, you're, assuming you have a place like Atlantic City, which is pure service industry, [R: right] by it's nature service industry pays lower wages. [R: right] At least comparatively speaking.

R: I don't think there's anything inherent in that, but that's uh, it has to do with how well (--) Basically it has to do with how well, I think that that has to do with how well labor is organized.

T: This is true. But labor traditionally has not been able to organize service industry, [R: right] because of the transitory nature of service industry. [R: umhm, umhm] If you ever get you know, a solid block of hotel waiters who are going to be hotel waiters for the rest of their lives in all of these hotels, [R: yeah] then we can start talking.

R: I mean that could change. I mean in (--)

T: This, this, yeah it could.

R: In 1932 you know the AFL was saying there's no way you're going to organize industrial workers, you know, so.

T: Yeah, yeah. No, that could change, you're right. But up until now nobody has been able to successfully, to really do it. [R: Yeah] Um, you had traditionally in North Adams neo-feudalism. [R: Yeah] You had the mill run by the patron [R: right] to whom the peasants would touch their forelock. And you had the peasant who touched their forelock. All Mass MoCa is doing is creating a similar, if not worse situation. Only now instead of the patron to whom you touch your forelock, you now have the grand eminences from the other communities who come in on the carriages to who you touch your forelock. [R: Right] And you have to touch your forelock (--)

R: And no jobs. [Laughs]

T: Well you have plenty of jobs, but they're jobs which are basically waiting on the eminences. And you have to be better at it than you ever were with Robert C. Sprague. I mean if you worked for Sprague, Sprague didn't care if you were ugly, stupid, drunk, upset, or anything else. You walked into the mill, you got the work out, that's it. He would like it if you were sort of grateful to him when he walked through and you say, "God bless you Mr. Sprague." But I mean it wasn't a requirement. If you're waiting on a lady and serving her watercrest sandwiches, it doesn't do to just walk up and say, "here you go babe", and slap it down and walk away. You're suppose to walk up, "yes madame, here's the (--) I noticed that we trimmed off the crust for you."

R: Well there's a problem there too. I mean, if the best restaurant in town is the Capital, I mean how are they going to serve these guys? [Chuckles]

T: But you see, they'll be building new restaurants. They will be opening new restaurants. [Long pause on tape] Creme de la Creme [R: right] who is in town has a hell of a time getting help. [R: right] They pay better than any other inn or restaurant around here, which isn't saying a lot, but I mean they do pay better. They have a better benefit program. They have all of this stuff. They can't keep help because the help don't know how to do this. They're not bred from the cradle to be servants. [R: Right, right] Service comes from serve us. [R: Right] Which is also the root of servant and serve. [R: Right] And these are mill workers. [R: Uh huh] You know it's one thing to be a mill worker, you do your thing man. Okay, I go to work, you know, I pound the machine, I get it out, but I you know, I don't take no shit from nobody. The foreman talks to me, I tell him to go shove it. Okay. You don't do that in a restaurant. You tell the foreman to go shove it, [snaps fingers] goodbye.

R: So uh, what's the alternative?

T: Uh, I've tossed around half a dozen and everybody tells me they won't work. Um, I think this state needs a secondary, not a secondary, a post secondary technical institute. A state school, a good one, that would attract (--) You know, like MIT attracts people to Boston, and all of the Boston Universities attract. I think (--)

R: They've got machinists and electronic techs. Yeah.

T: Yes. But I think what attracts [R: you don't think that the] small machine shops and small (--))

R: Community colleges serve that function?

T: Silly. Yeah.

R: No, I think you're probably right. [T: No. I know it] People have been talking about this for decades. [T: They don't even get close] A mechanics college, a machinist college.

T: Yeah, but I mean a real one. [R: Yeah] A real one. A real good one. [R: Right] One that people would will say, "holy shit, that's great!" And they will locate their shop near there. [R: Right] To pick up the people who come out of this place. [R: Umhm] Um, a major league real no fooling around incubator, SPIRE, Special Project for incu (--) Special Project Incubator for Retraining and Employment located in the Marshall Street Plant. Which they tell me is impossible, but I don't see how. I mean you can put, if you can put damn museum in there, you can put anything. Mills are adaptable.

R: I don't understand what that would look like. What is that?

T: Well it would look like about fifteen small industries scattered all over that big huge place.

R: Why not? They've done it in other places. [T: Yeah] Maynard, Massachusetts they did it for political (--)

T: Well they've done it fairly successfully in Manchester, New Hampshire, except they haven't called it really an incubator. Big foot! He's normally terrified of people. He must like you. [Unclear]

R: [Laughs] That's why he's scratching me huh?

T: Yeah, he plays. He thinks you're a real good guy and you'll play with him. Normally he runs away. You're crazy! [Must be talking about a dog] He says, he's sitting on the floor. He must be a good guy. Or um, a (--) All right, that's enough. You're going in the bathroom. I have never seen you behave like this. You're deranged. You probably have been drinking too much. [Speaking to the dog] Let's go. [Door slams] He doesn't even do that with me. Um, what was my third one? Let's see. That one, that one. There was another one I was just tossing around the other day. Uhhh, oh yeah! This was the wild one. Instead of having the offices for Massachusetts agencies that deal with the rural areas of the state located in Boston where they are useless, I think they should, all of the departmental heads (--) For example, the Department of Fishery and Wildlife, it's headquarters should be in North Adams, on Marshall Street. Why should you have to have a building for it in Boston? There aren't any fish, there isn't any wildlife. Put it out here. EEQU, put it out here. Decentralize. [R: DEM] DEM, why not? If General Electric, General Motors, Toyota, every company in New York can decentralize, why cannot State Government decentralize? It, you would be, it would save the taxpayers enormous amounts of money if the office complexes were located for certain agencies, not all of them of course, (--)

R: It's counter historical. I mean I think it's interesting, but I mean I think it's because, I mean the executive has been getting more and more power and that that would tend to, that would tend to undermine [T: exactly] the power. Yeah well [laughing], I mean but that's a very, that's another reason why it won't happen you see, because (--)

T: Well it could if you (--) Right now is when you could do it.

R: Uh huh, before it's too late.

T: Well you have, you have a certain disillusionment with the executive branch shall we say, [R: Uh huh] in this state and many other states. If you went on to some wonderful [demogargic?] thing where you're going, we've got to get the hand, the power out of the hands of these bastards that are consolidating it all. The best way to do it is to split it up. Bring it out here. You might have a shot. But that's the wild one. I think it would work, but no one else does.

R: So you think these people who say that MoCA is not feasible are just full of hot air, huh?

T: MoCA is feasible I think. That's what scares me. [R: Uh huh] I mean if I thought it wasn't feasible (--)

R: He's such a zip. I mean Kren's is such a zip. I believe he can get anything, you know, I mean [unclear].

T: If he can get eight pages in the New York Times [R: yeah] about this as a major concept, as the coming thing, as the wave of the future, it's going to happen. [R: Uh huh] It will happen. [R: Right] Trust me.

R: It's sort of a self-fulfilling fantasy, right? [T: Yeah, exactly] It's a [unclear]?

T: If the other world decides that indeed (--) What? I mean there's a classic example of decentralization right there. The Googenheim basically is setting up a museum in North Adams, Massachusetts. If the damn Googenheim, which is about as much New York as anything ever was can do that, why can't the state of Massachusetts do that? [Temporary malfunction with tape]

R: This is my life man, I'm going to (--)

T: My art is to like destroy air planes. I have this, and it's a very special thing. [R: Yeah, right (laughs)] I mean air planes like desecrate my space. Now you've got this air plane taking off here man and this is a desecration of space. So I have the stinger missile [R: laughs] and I'm going to take it out. Or (--)

R: I have beautiful pictures of the 1927 flood, which took out [T: oh yeah] a whole wall from the back end by River Street.

T: Yeah, I've seen a couple of them.

R: Yeah. And so how about as a sort of conceptual piece you see, you could get rid of the flood control. You see, recreate the flood. Take the side of the building out. [Laughs] [T: and then after] My conceptual piece.

T: And then after it's been taken out we'll get Christo to wrap it.

R: Yeah, we'll hire a lot of masons to rebuild it as sort of part of (--)

T: Yes. That's good. I like that. No, I think it's going to happen and I think the problem with it happening is it's going to cause all sort of horrible social economic change in town. And they don't, nobody, nobody wants to deal with that. They want to say either it's a boondoggle and it won't work, or it's the greatest thing since slice bread and it will work. And it will bring thousands of jobs to us. And we'll all be rich and happy and we'll be pie in the sky until we die.

R: Well I think Ann really through th, through the [unclear] down with that, with that editorial [T: yeah] was uh, was really a good (--) Because the fact is, I mean the one thing as, as super zips you know, as sort of New York hip as all these people are, I mean the one thing that they don't seem to be able to handle and it's at a lot of levels, they can't handle it, they don't care about it, and everything like that, is, and I'm amazed at it, is public relations. Is

it they don't really, in the last analysis they don't give a shit about the community. Six hundred and three jobs, that's all we have to care about. [T: yeah] One of the things that they don't think about is, this is what I think about as an historian, I'm a carpetbagger too after all, but uh, but one of the things that I've learned since I've been here is that, that that set of buildings there's a tremendous amount of sentiment in the community about that set of buildings. [T: Umhm] And Krens is totally disrespectful of that. That's irrelevant to his project. I mean the only thing he thinks about is in these (--)

T: Is they are big rooms.

R: Right, they're big rooms and in stock economic times, oh yeah, you want something? Here's six hundred and three jobs. [Claps hands] That, there, that takes care of that. All right? And you know, not the fact that you know, we're glad to have the jobs, but this is important though. I mean this is, you know, this is the biggest set of buildings right in the middle of this town. It's employed people since 1862. Uh, you know, everybody in town has either worked in that place, or has family members, or know somebody who works, worked in that place. [T: Yeah, exactly] Uh you know, [T: or is] and you have to relate to that as a, as a, that as a sociological fact.

T: Or has depended on the place [R: yeah] even if nobody in their family ever worked at it. I mean I know a guy, no one in his family has ever worked in Sprague Electric. On the other hand his family, for like seventy-five years, has run a bar [R: right] that has been patronized exclusively almost by Sprague Electric guys. [R: Right] And uh, you know, it, there's Sprague sentiment just in the bar. [R: Right] It's all, not just Sprague, the building. You know, "the building", the guys from "the building" have been going to this bar forever. So it's you know, it's there.

R: I've, I was amazed I mean, that the guy who is the plant guard there now, he's one of the, beside Paul [unclear], who is an engineer, he's like the last Sprague employee in this place. [T: Yeah] And he's the guy that pointed out this editorial to me. And he was glowing. And I found that interesting, because if anybody stands to gain from what Krens is doing, it's him, because he's already there, right? [T: Yeah, exactly] [R: Laughs]

T: He's hired. [R: Yeah] He'd be on the payroll forever.

R: Yeah. So uh (--)

T: Well the thing that got my infamous lentils thing written, you must have read that?

R: That was in the Advocate. [T: Yeah] Yeah.

T: Was the fact that they got, one of their PR people is gushing through the transcript about how they found all of these old, God knows what the hell they were. I don't know, and from the description I never have figured out what they are, old capacitors, or old filter pieces, or old [unclear].

R: They were old resistors actually.

T: They were old resistors, okay.

R: I know where they are in fact. [T: That's good] There's a whole (--)

T: Well they were going to give them out for party favors. [R: Right] Okay. I'm going, "oh no, wait a minute man, this is". And they're going how good this is. This is just, this is just like so great. I mean we're going to be like, we come in and we give you one of these man. And it's, you know, you put it in your pocket and oh God! I'm going, you know, (--)

R: They're going to make earrings out of them.

T: Yeah. This is making me really ill. So that's when I got into, all right, I'm going to get mad and I'm going to write something. So I wrote back. But if the idiot, and they have to be an idiot, had thought for thirty seconds about that, that is not PR. That's anti PR. It's you're, you're going to get somebody, maybe not the whole town, but you are going to get some big, some guy that made those, mad! [R: Right] Why say it? Why do it? I mean okay it's cute, maybe you can even do it, because you figured the guys that never made it are not going to show up. [R: At fifty bucks a plate, right] And the people from Milano, or someplace, who do show up, they're going to think it's cute and trendy too. Okay, fine, do it, but for God sake don't talk about it to the newspaper. [R: Chuckles] I don't mind New York glitz, I don't mind New York hype, I can live with it. Sometimes it's a lot of fun. But what I cannot stand in PR is incompetence. And that's what it was.

R: So, so, so were you without a full time job until, between the time that you got layed off and now?

T: No, no. I was, for three years I was the project coordinator at the Worker's Assistance Center.

R: Uh huh. Oh yeah. Maynard told me that. Yeah.

T: Which was uh, designed to put a lot of the former Sprague's and other mother plants back to work. Uh, that closed in July of '88. [R: Uh huh] So from July (--)

R: Put everybody back to work but you. [Laughs]

T: Yeah, basically, yes. That was about it. I had a client file of six guys left when we closed. And all of them are working now since then. So uh, we, we did our job. We had about eleven hundred people actually were registered clients with us and we put them all back to work. So bye bye. So since July of '88 up until today I was a free lance writer.

R: You didn't like that, or you just couldn't make enough money at it?

T: Oh I love it! I can't, couldn't make enough money at it. [R: Uh huh] What I was trying to do is start up another theater company. I write Murder Mystery Weekends.

R: Oh, do the whole sort of thing with participatory theater and stuff? Yeah.

T: Yeah. But I, what I never did have is any kind of sense of business or marketing. And I couldn't line up enough, enough dates. If I had been able to line up like ten dates I could make like twenty-five thousand dollars a year and do this happily for the rest of my life. But I'm not good at that. And I'm good at writing plays, but I'm not good at marketing them. So I finally had to accept straight work again. [R: Uh huh] You know I was making on the average of like one hundred, one hundred and fifty, two hundred, maybe three hundred dollars a month.

R: Oh, that's pretty dreadful.

T: Yes. That was, that's not enough to keep body and soul together [R: right] [laughs] and make car payments and you know, various assorted other things. I mean you could live simply, but not that simply. So I accepted full time straight employment again, because I can still (--) You know with this job I can still keep on doing that and maybe someday it'll catch a hold and [R: Uh huh] who knows.

R: So you're putting these projects together and see, they're like weekend things. So they last all weekend?

T: Yeah. Well here, I'll show you.

R: Like Ten Little Indians kind of thing?

T: Yeah! [R: yeah] It's very similar. Very similar. I'll give you one of my advertising brochures. [Long pause] Do you know anybody that needs a murder around the house? [R: Yeah, well maybe] Please give them my name.

R: Maybe we can get [unclear] that Marshall Street. But what a, what a place for (--)

T: It would be. [R: laughs] I have one almost [unclear].

R: Every time I've been over there I get lost.

T: I have one almost written already. I'm sure I could whip one together real fast.

R: So you could kill Tom Krens, you see, we cut this out.

T: Well I was, personally I would go more for John L. Sprague myself, but [R: J. L.] I think it would be a more popular murder in North Adams (--)

END OF TAPE